

Reviving Philip Massinger SAA Seminar Abstracts

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The Virgin Martyr in Repertory

The Virgin Martyr (1619) by Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger represents the best known saint play of the early modern era because it is frequently understood as the *only* saint play of the early modern era. Despite the identification of the play as the sole example of a saint play on the professional stage after the English Reformation, recent critics have approached the play with sophistication. Absent are debates over whether or not this is a Catholic or Protestant play. Instead, critics have shifted the conversation to consider the aesthetics, theatricality, and religious performativity of the play more broadly (Myhill, Degenhardt, Pickett, Waldron, and Moretti). In this essay, I build on this exciting work and place *The Virgin Martyr* in the context of the theatrical repertoire of its time. *The Virgin Martyr*, which depicts the acts and martyrdom of St. Dorothy, stands as a turning point among six Stuart virgin martyr plays. All of these plays feature angelic apparitions to musical accompaniment, books as apotropaic devices, and the miraculous – and often pyrotechnic – destruction of devils. Dekker and Massinger’s tragedy, however, is the first to stage the particular trial of sanctity that appears in three more saint plays of the Stuart era: a rape test. While these plays might look extraordinarily “religious” when compared to the canonical plays of the era, they rely primarily on rape and its miraculous avoidance as a stable signifier of sanctity. I argue that the scenarios of rape in four Stuart virgin martyr plays, led by *The Virgin Martyr*, articulate a sort of canonization process for theatrical sanctity.

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Massinger’s Images of Travel”

Although Massinger’s co-authored play *The Sea Voyage* has often been examined for its depictions of travel, Massinger has been overlooked as a playwright interested in travel as stage spectacle. This paper draws on work around *The Sea Voyage* to examine other works by Massinger and suggests that Massinger depends on and develops stage images of travel more broadly. For example, in *The Picture*, Massinger uses a representational (and variable) painting to bridge the distance between the bodies of husband and wife. In the context of other plays of the period, Massinger’s contributions to the use of travel imagery on the stage has been previously under-examined.

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Philip Massinger, Dramatic Form, and the Thirty Years' War

This paper takes up the old the very old topic of the “political element in Massinger,” an issue initially raised in the late 18th century but most famously explored by S. R. Gardiner in his 1876 essay of that title. According to Gardiner, Massinger returned again and again in his plays from the 1620s and 1630s to “a treatment of the politics of the day so plain and transparent” that it could not help being noticed by anyone with a passing familiarity with early Stuart politics. Massinger’s representation of contemporary politics was, in Gardiner’s view, “the standpoint of the Herberts,” one that favored Parliament over King, the constitution over arbitrary monarchical power, and English intervention in the Thirty Years’ War over peaceful alliances with Spain and the Habsburgs. Since the publication of Gardiner’s essay, scholars have continued to debate the politics of Massinger’s drama for almost 150 years. Given this long history, it would be entirely reasonable to believe, by now, that this question no longer needs to be examined, that it is time for new questions and new ways of reading Massinger. While this essay does return to the political element in Massinger, it also intends to connect that topic to a consideration of the formal structure of Massinger’s plays. In doing so, it hopes to offer new ways of understanding not only the kinds of arguments that Massinger’s plays were making about the continental war and political divisions in England, but also about the unexpected influence of the dramatic form he used again and again in his plays.

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Lovell in the Cave of Mammon: A Jacobean Allusion to Spenser

In the first scene of act 4 of *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, Massinger subjects his noble hero Lord Lovell to Overreach’s powerful efforts to persuade Lovell to marry his daughter. In devising this scene, the playwright clearly had in view the episode in book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* where Guyon descends into Mammon’s cave to be tempted by Mammon’s offer of untold wealth together with the bait of Mammon’s daughter, Timē (“honor”). This paper will compare Massinger’s use of Spenser in this scene with his six other known allusions to Spenser in five of his plays and in his letter to his patron, Pembroke. Spenser’s poem, published in 1596, had subsequently been suppressed owing to its presumed representation of King James’s mother Mary, Queen of Scots, who figures as the notorious Duessa. Massinger probably first encountered *The Faerie Queene* when it reappeared in 1611 and 1617, by which time Spenser’s original fount of honor—the court of Elizabeth and Leicester—had been superseded by the Jacobean court and society familiar to Massinger. By treating Massinger as a Jacobean (or Caroline) reader of Spenser, I hope to illuminate the widely recognized generational change in the mores dramatized by Massinger as those contrast with the mores of his Elizabethan predecessors.

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“Our wants that feed your plenty”: Inglorious Soldiers in *The Unnatural Combat*

This paper will explore how Massinger’s *The Unnatural Combat* engages with early Caroline political tensions by bringing together appetite and hunger onstage. Topical resonances with military humiliations of the 1620s, in the expeditions to the Palatinate and Cadiz, combine to frame the play’s corrupt admiral Malefort as an extended allusion to the widely-hated Duke of Buckingham. In the imaginative overlap between these current events, and the social weight that alimentary practices carry in Stuart England, we can observe the scope of *The Unnatural Combat*’s political critique. Appetite and hunger serve as the dominant imaginative terms in the play’s political vocabulary, and locate the Governor’s banquet table as the polemical center of the drama. Through the complaint of the “cast captain” Belgarde, who appears uninvited at the feast seeking aid in his poverty, Massinger emphasizes that Malefort’s appetites—and by extension, Buckingham’s—are peripheral to the failures of obligation that have deprived the hungry veteran. Instead, Belgarde’s onstage juxtaposition with the loaded table suggests the Governor’s neglected responsibilities, and implicitly condemns Charles I for military and subsistence failures. Dressing the recognizable dramatic figure of the glutton in the colors of contemporary events, Massinger obliquely participates in public debates over the Petition of Right, contesting the exercise of royal authority and suggesting the threat to ordinary Englishmen posed by an unchecked royal will.

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Post-Roman Triumphs in the Plays of Philip Massinger

This essay looks at triumphs in five plays by Philip Massinger written between roughly 1622 and 1632. Four of these take place in the empires around the rim of the ancient Mediterranean. *The Roman Actor* takes place in Domitian's imperial Rome, *Believe as You List* follows a fugitive king from Carthage to Bithynia to Callipolis to Syracuse before he is captured and taken to late imperial Rome, *The Virgin Martyr* takes place in an ancient colonial Cappadocia under Diocletian's reign, and *The Bondman* tells the story of a Corinthian general saving ancient Syracuse from a Carthaginian invasion. These plays, like their Elizabethan and early Jacobean predecessors, use the triumph as a figure for the cruelty underlying Roman imperial glory, but they extend and amplify this critique, while simultaneously attributing the ritual of the triumph to sites beyond peak imperial Rome. In the plays of the 1620s written by Massinger and his close associates, almost no Roman emperors from the high point of the empire actually appear in triumph: instead, freed slaves mimic their former masters, a lascivious late-imperial empress arrogates her husband's power, savage post-Roman Vandals imitate the triumphal form in the Germanic wilderness, and a collapsing late-imperial Rome produces processions that retain only the cruelty of the triumphal form, absent its glory. In depicting these events, Massinger's plays imagine a post-Augustan epoch in which the triumph has become a dangerously mobile ritual

appropriated by those who seek Roman power and who become, in turn, barbaric. I conclude by showing how Massinger embeds this critique in another unexpected site: *The City Madam*, a city comedy set in contemporary London and through which he extends this critique into London's present moment. In doing so, the playwright diegetically illustrated and reflected on the act of imitating triumph, a process occurring both in the spread and reuse of the set-piece in the repertory systems of the early modern theater and in the ritual's simultaneous propagandistic appropriation by civic and royal powers outside the theater.

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The City Madam, the King's Men and the West Indies

This paper will explore a new context for Massinger's *The City Madam*: the financial dealings that surrounded the King's Men and their playhouses in the 1620s and early 1630s. Drawing on fresh documentary material, it will explore the colonial investments of the long-standing actor-sharer John Heminges and his family, examining the ways in which playhouse and colonial investments were intertwined, and the human cost of this financial speculation. Heminges invested not only in the Globe and Blackfriars but also in what a lawsuit after his death called 'a desperate adventure vnto the West Indyces'. One of his sons-in-law was Ralph Merefield, a partner of Thomas Warner in the settlement of St Kitts. Merefield died in considerable debt in December 1631, about six months before *The City Madam* was licensed for performance by the King's Men. My paper will place *The City Madam* within an alternative theatre history, grounding the King's Men, its sharers and their playhouses in questions of culture, gender and race that are often framed only in terms of their plays. It will argue that the play dramatizes not only the fantasies of colonists but the disasters that overtook men like Merefield, and the impact of colonialism on the families and households of the London citizenry. In doing so, it will establish an enriched but increasingly complex picture of the local and global contexts with which the plays of Massinger and others were entwined.

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The Dearth of the Author

This essay examines the curious textual elision of Philip Massinger from the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher folio. Massinger is not credited with the joint authorship of the plays in the folio even though his contribution to the collection was far more substantial than Beaumont's. Indeed, Massinger's name seems very infrequently associated with Fletcher's either before or after the publication of the folio, even though the pair collaborated prolifically (far more regularly than Fletcher/Beaumont, Fletcher/Shakespeare, Middleton/Rowley or other more celebrated partnerships from the period). Many Fletcher/Massinger plays went on to enjoy sustained success in print and/or performance, but they were routinely advertised as Beaumont/Fletcher collaborations, or else ascribed solely to Fletcher. Massinger was a significant writer in his own

right and his name was vendible enough to advertise his solo-plays both in his lifetime and after, but he never received enough credit for his contribution to the Fletcher canon and the Jacobean repertory of the King's Men. In this essay, I ask why and try to think about what his elision means.

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Reviving Philip Massinger in 1623/4

This paper takes literally the seminar's title of 'Reviving Philip Massinger' by looking at the manuscript behind a theatrical revival of a play in which Massinger is assumed to have had a hand (or at least a minor finger). The manuscript copy of *The Honest Man's Fortune* (MS. Dyce 9 at The Victoria and Albert Museum) may be the product of an initially unintended process of revision. Herbert's 'reallowing' annotation calls the play 'an olde one' and explains that the new MS was prepared when the 'Original' was 'lost'. Comparison of the manuscript text with that of the play printed in the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher Folio reveals dozens of differences. The divergence spans small verbal changes to the addition/absence of a whole scene. Piecing together the textual processes that made the manuscript, through comparison of the texts and analysis of the document itself, may give an unusual insight into how Massinger wrote for – and was rewritten in – the playhouse. The practical and conceptual difficulties in establishing exactly where Massinger begins and ends in the manuscript offer a suggestive starting point for thinking about the merits of the dispersed nature of our author's dramatic canon. Time and space allowing, I shall sketch how the other extant playhouse manuscripts to which Massinger contributes present a diversity of textual engagements that are peculiarly consonant with Massinger's current edited presence across authorial canons.

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“The commodity is the same”: Trafficking in Women in Marriage and Prostitution in *The City Madam*”

Philip Massinger's ironic and intriguing title, *The City Madam*, is misleading to say the least, according to Frederick Boas. One normally associates the term “madam” with a woman engaged in the practice of prostitution, but in this instance, the madam in question is none other than Lady Frugal, wife of Sir John Frugal, a wealthy London merchant, not a prostitute who is in supervisory position over other prostitutes at a brothel. Hence, we are in the world of London city comedy in which the shortcomings and foibles of London mercantile society are critiqued by Luke, the brother of Sir John Frugal. Throughout this play marriageable young women are treated as so many “portions” and “jointures” in exchange for a goodly sum by other young men from other moneyed families. Moreover, Lady Frugal acts as an impresario over her daughters' marital negotiations, so that Anne and Mary may receive the most financially advantageous

marriage proposals. Anne makes her expectations known to Sir Maurice Lacy as does Mary who makes her expectations known in much the same way to Plenty. Ironically, they may appear to have the upper hand until their Uncle Luke takes over their father's finances much to their dismay upon the pretext that he is deceased. Juxtaposed to their wrangling for the wealthiest husbands at the same time a brothel scene is depicted in which Goldwire bargains for the sexual favors of Shavem in much the same way as Sir Maurice and Plenty bargained for their marriages to Anne and Mary in an earlier scene. As Dingem, a pimp, in this brothel scene states to Goldwire, "Yes, sir; for marriage, and the other thing too/The commodity is the same. An Irish lord offer'd her/Five pound a week." Using feminist and Marxist criticism, I wish to critique the traffic in women as integral to the financial and social structure of early modern London.

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Romance as parody in *The Bashful Lover* and *The Guardian*

This paper examines Massinger's use of romance forms in his last two plays, *The Guardian* and *The Bashful Lover*. It's an old and old-fashioned argument that the entry of writers associated with the court of Henrietta Maria into the professional theatre in the 1630s changed the work produced by established playwrights already working there. Studies of 'cavalier playwrights' (Carlell, Suckling, Montague, Cartwright, Killigrew, Davenant and others) begin with the detailed but dismissive work of Harbage and Bowers, and continue through the work of Butler, Clark, Zucker and others. To use Clark's categories, even the question of who qualifies as a courtier or a professional is uncertain; Clark argues that there was conflict between the professional playwrights who were dependant on the companies for their income and the court poets whose plays undercut the professionals' market. However, a figure like Davenant can be put on either side of the divide, and Shirley is equally ambiguous. Whether or not this conflict between the two camps was real, the works that "professional playwrights" produce in the 1630s draw on the forms of Caroline courtly romance, often inserting these anachronistically into satiric comedies or darker tragicomedies. In the case of Jonson (*A New Inn*) and Brome (*The Antipodes*, *The Court Beggars*) this can have the effect of burlesque, but Massinger's treatment of such elements is more serious and more seamless. By the early 1630s Massinger had been producing Fletcherian romantic tragicomedy for almost two decades, and there isn't a great difference of genre between *The Bashful Lover*, his last surviving play, and earlier works such as *The Parliament of Love* or *The Great Duke of Florence*. But in this paper I'm going to suggest that the use of romance in his last surviving plays tips into parody, however seriously he seems to treat the form and its conventions. This is most clear in *The Guardian*, which contains a number of parodic romance elements, but while *The Bashful Lover* seems to play these elements straight, their sheer volume is absurd. The play is a mass of romance conventions; exiled courtiers live as hermits in the woods, friends struggle to outdo each other in sacrifice, magical potions revive the dead and dying, and more than half of the named characters don disguise at some point. The plot is a welter of cross-dressed ladies, lost heirs found, disguised rulers, and commoners revealed as noble. The material is witty and deftly handled, but the mixture is too rich to take seriously. I want to do two things with this paper: first, establish that this parodic tone actually exists, and second, explore what its function could be. Massinger's earlier works

typically turn on ethical issues, seriously handled and subject to debate; his plays conclude with staged trials or court scenes and he is nothing if not earnest. The surviving last plays are a distinct departure which warrants examination.

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New World Spaces and “Fit decorum”:
Foreign Threat and Domestic Order in *The Sea Voyage* and *The City Madam*

At a conference dedicated primarily to Shakespeare, it is fitting that the two Massinger plays in this paper bear the Bard’s influential stamp. Massinger and Fletcher’s *The Sea Voyage* can claim *The Tempest*, whereas *The City Madam* shows a *Measure for Measure*-like plot twist. In both Massinger plays, I follow the attenuation of Shakespearian themes through the threads of colonial spaces and domestic decorum. In these plays, violations of space occur that draw critical attention to the non-English spaces that complicate threats to comedic outcomes. *The City Madam* stages moments of spatial violation as overt conflicts of gender politics and the renegotiation of boundaries and authority. However, the play implicitly suggests that these violations are the result of an intrusion of non-English commodities and values, thus materializing an interrogation of the spatial politics of the home and questioning the efficacy of the household as nation simile. *The Sea Voyage*’s Amazonian women complicate normative power structures by reflecting colonial possibility. Their island home, a kind of spatial violation, is a threat to decorum and presents as a consequence of colonial exploration. Tied into the avarice of the male characters, the island space becomes a metonymic setting for misrule and placelessness, driven by specifically foreign colonial pursuits. Both plays circumscribe foreignness beyond non-English European commodity culture to capture the dangerous nuance of colonial expansion. New world colonial space proves to be a more incisive threat to various networks of exchange, both economic and familial.